

# "DING" DARLING WILDLIFE SOCIETY



## ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, the non-profit Friends of the Refuge organization, supports the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex through the generation of independent funds to support conservation education, internships, biology research, informational literature, advocacy, land acquisition and facility enhancements. Efforts may extend beyond the Complexes borders and involve partnerships with like-minded conservation organizations.

# Letter from the President

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you for your generous philanthropy and active support of the Refuge.

As I write this letter, my last as president of the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS), I’m indeed grateful for what we have been able to accomplish together. I feel truly blessed to have had the honor and pleasure to work with such a great group of board, emeritus board, and Society members as well as an incredible staff and an enviable group of donors and volunteers. You served to reinforce the reality that there is no challenge too great nor opportunity too complex that together we can’t overcome and achieve success. The year 2020, like no other, has demonstrated that when we work together, we can continue the legacy Jay Norwood “Ding” Darling left to us, even in the most testing of circumstances. Were he alive today, I am confident he would be proud to see what we, as a team, accomplished this year, what we’ve done in the past, and the future plans we’re working on.

This 75th anniversary year of the Refuge has provided a special opportunity to celebrate past accomplishments and plan for the future. Since the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society was established in 1982, it has a singular mission – to support the J. N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex through the generation of independent funds to undertake student education, internships, wildlife and water research projects, informational literature, advocacy, land acquisition, restoration and facility enhancements. I’m incredibly proud of the work we collectively do to achieve this mission, and especially of the fact that during our last fiscal year 80% of every dollar raised was directly invested in making our conservation mission a reality.

Without doubt, our most significant challenge this year has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our activities. But with dedication, creativity and imagination we’ve learned how to minimize that impact without compromising the health and safety of those involved. We quickly figured out how to work virtually, how to use Zoom, how to work wearing masks, and how to continue our boots-on-the-ground activities. Even with the combined impact of the closure of the Refuge Visitor & Education Center and our Nature Store for more than half of the year, a tremendous amount has been accomplished.

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Doris Hardy

### Vice President

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Marc Giattini

Chip Lesch

John McCabe

Cindy Pierce

Jeanne Rankin

Jim Scott

Jim Sprinkle

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Marc Giattini

Vasanta Senerat

## Advisors to Board

Vasanta Senerat

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Chelle Koster Walton

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### Assoc. Executive Director

Lynnae Messina

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April Boehnen

### Development Compliance Officer

Dot Voorhees

### Office Manager

Joann Hinman

### Nature Store Manager

Ann-Marie Wildman

### Assistant store Managers

Christopher Galloway

Carrie Harmon

### Urban Conservation Educator

Melissa Maher

The following is an overview of just some of the things the Society and its team of staff, volunteers, members and donors helped make happen during the last twelve months:

- Prior to the onset of COVID-19 we were able to fund field trips to the refuge for many local school children from at-risk schools. We continue to provide the salary for a fulltime conservation educator who is currently working alongside Refuge staff to deliver virtual programs to area schools.
- Having finalized the purchase of the 68-acre Wulfert Bayous parcel late last year, we were able to officially name it as the Refuge's Lee Anne Tauck Conservation Tract in January.
- While still in its final stages, the planning, design and construction of our soon-to-be-unveiled WoW (Wildlife on Wheels) mobile classroom is actively moving forward thanks, in no small part, to the vision and ongoing support of our donors.
- The Society pays for and supports up to 12 interns each year to help the refuge accomplish its conservation work. Two of our current interns are fluent in Spanish and will be directly helping the WoW with urban outreach.
- We established two new permanently endowed funds and welcomed six new members to our 45/82 Society (individuals who have named the DDWS in their estate plans).
- We continued to help get the Refuge wildlife and habitat conservation message out to the public. With nearly 1 million annual Refuge visitors, we support the printing of maps; informational brochures; interpretive signs; exhibits both inside and outside the Visitor Center, activity books etc. In addition, our social media "followers" increased by 55% and the number receiving our electronic e-newsletter, "Ding" on the Wing, now exceeds 30,000.
- We created a new board committee on Diversity and Inclusion dedicated to encouraging residents from local under-represented communities to visit and appreciate the wildlife and habitat of the Refuge.
- With continued federal funding cuts in refuge support and the devastating impact of adverse water quality on the Refuge, we increased our advocacy efforts at the local, county, state and national levels.
- Even with the dramatic impact of COVID-19, which shut most everything down less than halfway through the year, the Society was able to welcome its first Artist in Residence, Ed Anderson. We were also able to hold two very successful fundraising events, Go Wild for Ding and Project Refuge, and we welcomed renowned speakers for our lecture series, including famed photographer Clyde Butcher.

Success requires a truly dedicated effort, and it takes a village to make it a reality. It's only through the combined partnership and support of individuals, families, businesses and foundations that the Society is able to continue helping the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge be a thriving habitat for wildlife as well as an inspiration for our visitors. Every single visit serves to reinforce the importance of protecting and preserving public lands, like our Refuge, not only here but nationwide.

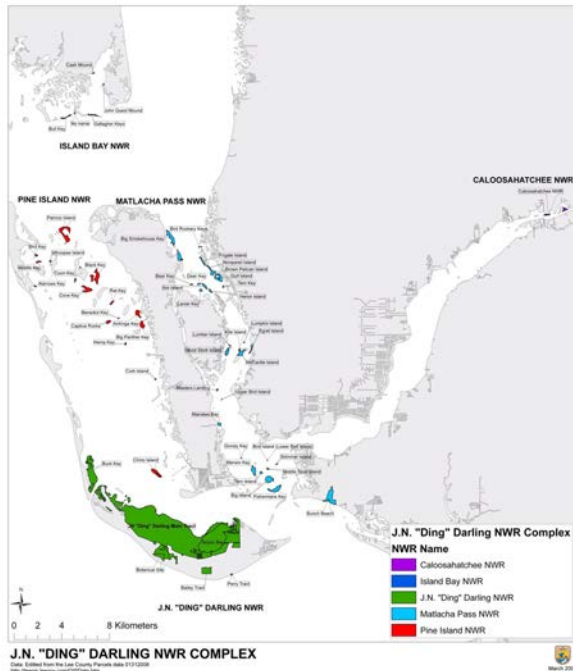
My personal thanks to you, our loyal family of members, friends, volunteers, donors and staff, for your commitment to and love of the Refuge! Your support through our Society, in whatever form it takes, is vital to help make it all happen.

Sincerely,



Mike Baldwin, President  
"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society





## J.N. "DING" DARLING NWR COMPLEX

The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge is managed as part of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex. A National Wildlife Refuge

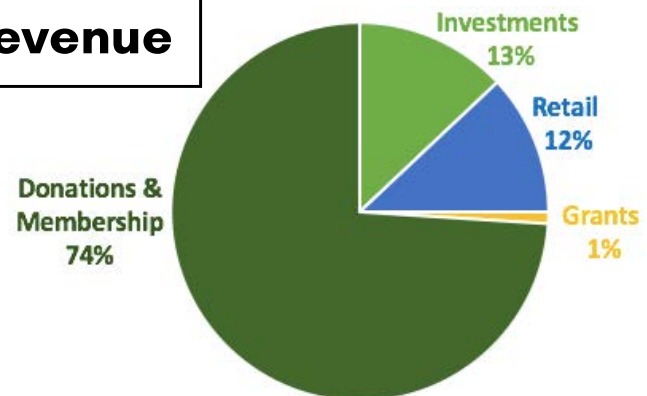
Complex is an administrative grouping of two or more refuges, wildlife management areas, or other refuge conservation areas managed from a central office. The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex also includes the Caloosahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Matlacha Pass National Wildlife Refuge, Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge, and Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge. These lands are primarily mangrove islands, many of which are nesting and roosting areas for wading birds and other water birds. The entire complex includes approximately 8,000 acres.

## 2019-2020 Revenue & Expenditures

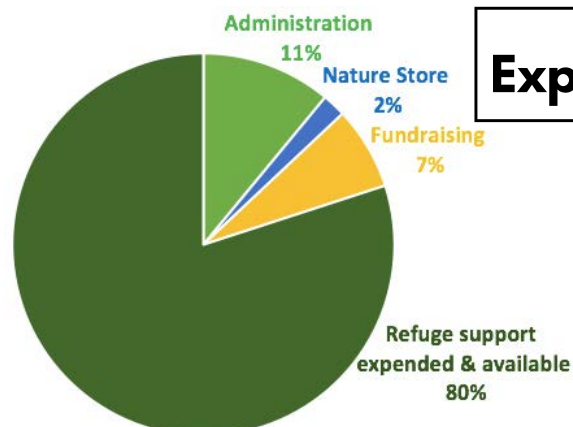
Government funding does not cover all that is necessary to manage a refuge the size of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex. As a result, wildlife refuges depend on "Friends" groups such as the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS) to fill in the gaps, providing financial and volunteer support. In 2019-2020, total philanthropic support and other income sources to the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society totaled \$2,885,216.

A total of 80% of DDWS expenditures went directly to helping the JNDDNWR Complex in the areas of conservation, wildlife protection, research, education, land acquisition and restoration. Refuge support also includes items such as exhibits, solar panels, student busing, equipment, interpretive signage, walkways, construction projects, internships, and water research and wildlife and biology research.

### Revenue



### Expenditures



# Covid Response

This past year, in the face of unprecedented challenges presented by COVID-19, DDWS has been hard at work striving to adapt as best we can in order to ensure continued and consistent support of the refuge. These efforts looked different during this trying time, but our team, in collaboration with the refuge, pulled off many creative initiatives to continue spreading the wonder of "Ding" Darling and the importance of conservation, while still being Covid conscious.



Ding at Home: Crafts, games, activities, and educational videos were all made available online for families during the spring/summer Covid quarantine period.



## Once-a-Month Givers

OMG: A once a month giver recurring donation program to support the Refuge for the long haul. 17 members to date.



Virtual Summer Camp: A camp put on by education staff and interns provided informational videos and guided activities.



Virtual Fundraiser: A "Baby Bird Shower" was thrown as a fun way to support the Refuge virtually.



Owl Pellet Dissection: the Refuge Education Team's dissection activity was a one-hour taped lesson led by Refuge educators which allowed participants to follow along remotely.

# Wildlife Research

**Water Quality Research** - Through philanthropic support, the Society purchased water quality monitoring equipment which allows the Refuge to document changes in our waters. Water management from Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee greatly impact the refuge and require monitoring in order to better understand how lake releases impact water quality within the refuge boundaries.

**Other Wildlife Research** - Throughout the year, the DDWS supported various research projects to benefit wildlife at the refuge.



## Advocacy

Our advocacy committee continues to attend meetings virtually and in-person as they work to inform the public and our elected officials on important issues. The DDWS has also invested in advocacy software to strengthen our outreach to elected officials in Washington and beyond.

## Land Acquisition & Restoration

The DDWS continues its commitment to exploring further land acquisition and restoration opportunities in partnership with the Refuge. In the past year, the newest land acquisition was named the Lee Anne Tauck Conservation Tract. Restoration plans are underway.



## Endowed Funds

An endowment is an investment to the mission of the conservation efforts of protecting land and wildlife at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Your gift of \$10,000 can establish an endowment that will leave your legacy and make future sustainability possible. Investing in establishing an endowment shows that you are dedicated to the long term support of the Refuge. The following is a list of current endowed funds supporting conservation efforts at the Refuge:

The Betty Bishop Education Fund

Marilyn Kloosterman Education Fund

David A. Drachman Education Fund

Dr. Robert G. Meeker Conservation Fund

Harkey Family Fund

Dr. H. Randall Deming Scholarship for Conservation & Environmental Studies Fund

Elaine Jacobson Education Fund

Jane Werner Environmental Scholarship Fund

Win and Marilyn Kloosterman Scholarship Fund

Wild for "Ding" Conservation Fund

***\*An endowment can be established in anyone's name with a minimum gift of \$10,000***

# New at "Ding"

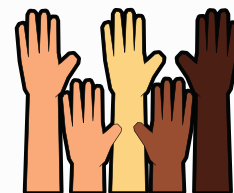
This year DDWS helped fund and create the "Ding" Studio. This is an interactive new exhibit within the refuge's Visitor and Education Center which displays a re-imagination of Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling's work studio and Duck Stamp program.



Lots of progress has been made on the construction of the Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) mobile classroom initiative, which aims to bring wildlife education and the magic of "Ding" to nearby and underserved urban communities.



## Diversity & Inclusion



In an effort to be more inclusive and welcoming to all, DDWS has taken a number of steps to promote a greater sense of diversity within the "Ding" community.

Some of these actions include:

- The hiring of 2 bilingual Spanish Speaking interpretation interns who will help bridge any language barriers which might hinder accessibility to the 22% of Lee County residents who identify as Latinx.
- Construction of the Wildlife on Wheels mobile classroom which will travel to and provide environmental education within urban and underserved communities.
- 2020 celebration of Hispanic Heritage month with translation games and Martes Mamífero on social media.
- Offering of conversational Spanish classes to DDWS and refuge staff.
- DDWS's official statement on racism put forth in June 2020.



We also welcomed former intern April Boehnen as a new fulltime Development and Events officer.

# Education

The land connects us all, and at a moment when our nation seems more divided than any time in recent history, the opportunity we have with the Refuge and its educational programming gives us the chance to connect people of all ages with the wonders of nature and wildlife and connect them to one another. An investment in knowledge pays the best interest. The educational efforts the DDWS supports at the Refuge is a great investment in protecting what is left of our wild spaces, helping the nearly 1 million annual visitors to the Refuge understand the importance of preservation here at the Refuge and beyond.

Prior to Covid-19, the DDWS supported student field trips to the Refuge and has since been providing virtual learning experiences. Throughout the year, DDWS supports a significant number of educational programs to assist the refuge in its mission.



## Volunteers

With nearly 8,000 acres to manage in the Refuge Complex and approximately 1 million annual visitors from around the world, volunteers are vital to helping the Refuge staff achieve their conservation work. Volunteers help in many ways at “Ding;” serving as front desk ambassadors, helping in the Refuge Nature Store, assisting administration and maintenance staff, running education programs, serving as rovers on Wildlife Drive, and so much more. The DDWS supports the volunteer program by helping to cover expenses for volunteers.

While much of 2020 has looked different for volunteers due to Covid-19, in 2019 alone 311 different volunteers contributed 37,397 hours of service which saved the refuge over \$900,000 in labor costs.

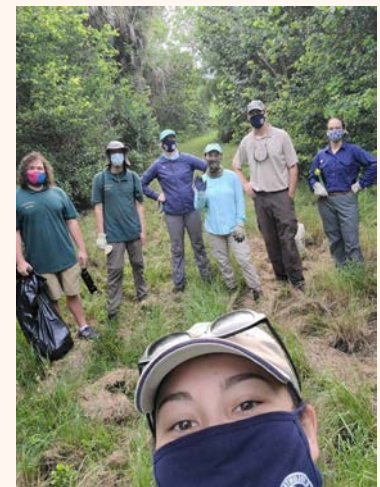
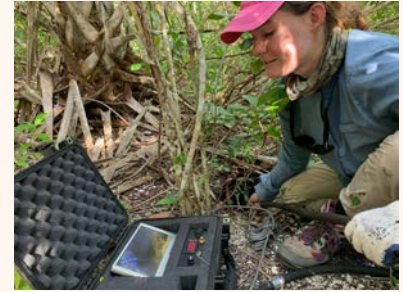
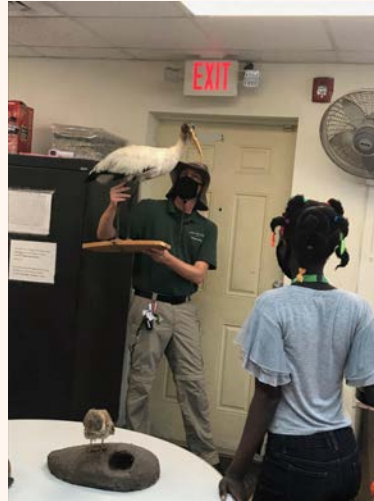


# Internship Program

With a 50% decrease in Refuge staff, the DDWS continues each year in helping the Refuge with the shortages by hiring interns to assist Visitor Services, Biology, Education, as well as fund their own Society staff. In 2019/2020, DDWS supported eleven interns, at the cost of \$12,000 per intern.

Interns gain invaluable skills and knowledge while working at the Refuge.

The internship program provides opportunities for recent college graduates to learn hands-on about the environment and Refuge operations, creating our next generation of conservation stewards.



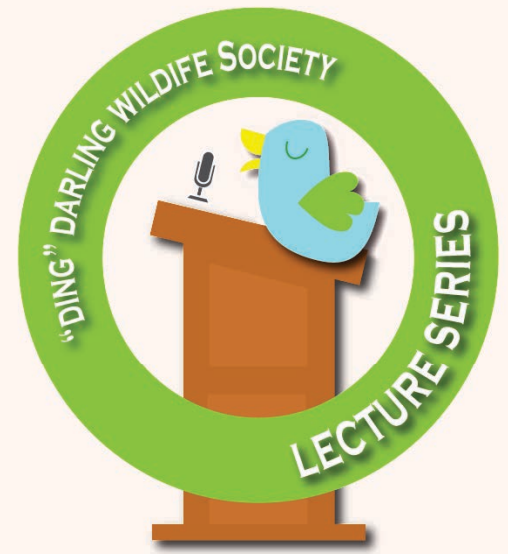
## The Nature Store

As a result of COVID-19, the Visitor & Education Center as well as the Nature Store were closed to the public beginning in mid-March. The closing of the Nature Store resulted in a significant loss of revenue for the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society.

- [Shopdingdarling.com](https://shopdingdarling.com)- Shortly before Covid-19, The Nature Store debuted an online sales platform at Shopdingdarling.com. This adaptation has offered contactless pickup as well as online exclusive deals and has been largely successful with helping to mitigate some of the lost revenue during the pandemic.
- [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/shopdingdarling)- On March 28th, 2020 The Nature Store shared an inaugural post on their new Instagram page @shopdingdarling. The page is used to market and promote items for sale online and in store and to-date has garnered upwards of 300 followers.
- 100% of Nature Store profits go directly towards supporting the Refuge

# Events

- **Project Refuge-** The Couture fashion show using trash and recyclables was a big hit this past March. Twenty-three designers along with their design teams modeled re-purposed creations on the runway raising \$35,000 for conservation education.
- **Go Wild for "Ding"-- Lovin' Spoonbills-** This year the annual February Go Wild for "Ding" fundraiser chose to celebrate our lovely signature Roseate Spoonbills, and raised nearly \$315,000.
- **Clyde Butcher-** As part of the 2019 Lecture Series, on January 24th award-winning photographer Clyde Butcher presented two free programs at the "Ding" Darling Visitor & Education Center. The program was based on his publication *Big Cypress Swamp: The Western Everglades* and other photographic books.
- **Tarpon Tournament-** The 9th annual Tarpon Tournament was unfortunately postponed due to Covid-19, but many of the generous sponsors allowed us to keep their donations to raise a total of \$15,000.



## Lecture & Film Series

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society hosted a Friday Lecture Series and a Wednesday Biweekly Film Series. The 2020 series successfully showcased 9 lectures and 5 films, before having to halt in March due to Covid-19



## Contests

- Amateur Photo Contest- This annual contest is open to any amateur photographer. First place in 2019 went to Kent Jager for his photo of a White-eyed Vireo.
- Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest- This contest, funded by the family of the late Theodore Cross, runs October-January and is open to all high school students in Lee, Charlotte, Collier, Glades, and Hendry counties, regardless of skill level. In 2020 first place went to Virginia Bayne for her photo of a deer.
- Cartoon Contest- This contest which is open to 5th-8th graders from six Lee County schools has been running for more than 25 years. This year's winner was Zachary Yoshida from Cypress Lake Middle School.



Photo by: Kent Jager

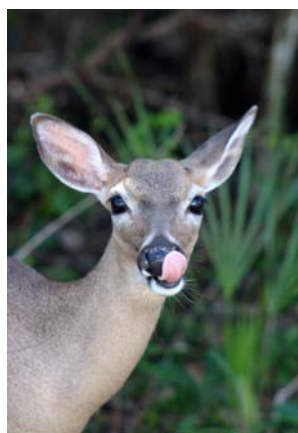
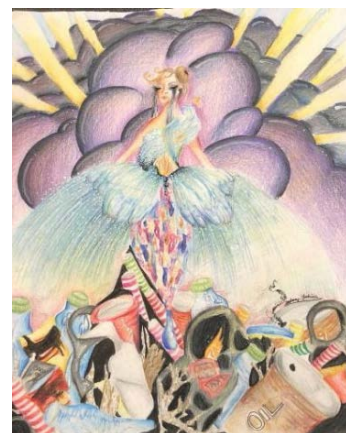


Photo by: Virginia Bayne



Art by: Zachary Yoshida

## 45/82

By designating the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society as a beneficiary in their estate plans, anyone can leave a legacy and become a member. This past year the 45/82 Society gained 4 new members.



## Scholarships & Funding

- 2020 "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society Environmental Scholarship Awards- The goal of this program is to encourage students to pursue a higher education degree in environmental studies or a related field. In 2020 there were 11 award recipients totaling \$20,700 in funds received.
- Environmental Education Grants- Every year the DDWS awards grants to teachers and educators in order to take on environmental education projects. This year over \$9,000 was awarded to educators, however due to Covid-19, many recipients were unable to complete their project but are optimistically planning to complete them this school year.
- Everglades Coalition Conference- In January 2020 the DDWS sponsored and hosted the 35th annual EVCO on Captiva. EVCO is an alliance of 60+ conservation and environmental organizations with the mission of fully restoring the Everglades ecosystem.



# Thank you for Supporting the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society

*"Land, water and vegetation are just that dependent on one another. Without these three primary elements in natural balance, we can have neither fish nor game, wild flowers nor trees, labor nor capital, nor sustaining habitat for humans."* – Jay Norwood Darling

